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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SARAJEVO 000101

SIPDIS

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EUR/SCE(HYLAND/SILBERSTEIN/STINCHCOMB); NSC FOR  
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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [PTER](#) [KJUS](#) [KCRM](#) [BK](#)

SUBJECT: BOSNIA: ARREST OF ASSISTANT SECURITY MINISTER  
SHOCKS BIH AND RAISES MANY TROUBLING QUESTIONS

REF: A. 07 SARAJEVO 1071

[1](#)B. 07 SARAJEVO 1583

Classified By: DCM Judith B. Cefkin, 1.4 (b),(d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: On January 16 Croatian police arrested Bosnian State Level Assistant Minister of Security Vjekoslav Vukovic in Rijeka, pending further investigation into his alleged role in procuring weapons and explosives for an aborted murder attempt. At this point, it is still unclear as to what, if any, concrete evidence may exist linking Vukovic to the alleged crime. At the time of his arrest, Vukovic was driving an official government vehicle, allegedly without authorization. Since his arrest Vukovic has been temporarily suspended from his position in the ministry. Vukovic had been an effective chairman of the Citizenship Review Commission (CRC), which was established to determine whether individuals who acquired Bosnian citizenship between April 1992 and January 1996 had done so legally. Vukovic was the leading Croat candidate for the Directorship of the newly formed state-level police agency for forensics. The arrest has garnered significant press coverage, and is being exploited by politicians to advance their own narrow agendas, particularly as it relates to the threat posed by terrorism and Islamic extremism. Minister of Security Tarik Sadovic has used the arrest to publicly discredit Vukovic and his work, including the CRC, and has made statements to reporters about Vukovic's "close relations with US intelligence circles." End Summary

The Arrest

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[1](#)2. (SBU) On January 16 Croatian police arrested Assistant Minister of Security Vjekoslav Vukovic under suspicion of having sold a weapon and explosives intended for use in the murder of the owner of a Rijeka private security firm. Vukovic is a dual citizen of Bosnia and Croatia. Shortly after the arrest Croatian Interior Minister Tomislav Karamarko called Bosnian Minister of Security Tarik Sadovic to inform him of the incident. We are told that Vukovic, if convicted, could face a jail term ranging from three to thirty years. However, it is at this point unclear as to what, if any, concrete evidence may exist linking Vukovic to the alleged crime. Likely fearing that Vukovic would flee to Bosnia (which has no extradition treaty with Croatia), a Rijeka court refused to grant Vukovic bail and remanded him to custody for 30 days, pending further investigation. Vukovic's lawyer Antun Senona told media that Vukovic denied all charges and was shocked by what he described as his

"media lynching" in both Bosnia and Croatia.

Who is Vukovic?

13. (C) At the time of his arrest Vjekoslav Vukovic was Assistant Minister at the Ministry of Security in charge of the Section for fighting terrorism, organized crime, and illegal narcotics. Vukovic had also been chairman of the Citizenship Review Commission, which was established to determine whether individuals who acquired Bosnian citizenship between April 1992 and January 1996 had done so legally. The CRC's work, which enjoyed strong US support, focused primarily on foreign fighters of Middle Eastern/North African origin, many of whom had their citizenship stripped. Vukovic, who is widely regarded as one of the few competent employees at the Ministry of Security, was a leading contender for the position of Director of the newly-created state-level agency for forensics. Vukovic was a regular US Embassy contact and also worked closely with OHR.

Sadovic's Response

14. (C) Conservative Bosniaks have attempted to use Vukovic's arrest to call into question the CRC's work. Minister of Security Tarik Sadovic wasted little time in making the arrest public and added that Vukovic, whom he does not like, had been using an official vehicle without authorization and would be suspended. Sadovic (has often downplayed the possibility of Islamic terrorism in Bosnia) could not refrain

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from publicly discrediting Vukovic, while also not so subtly calling into question Vukovic's work. Furthermore, Sadovic highlighted Vukovic's connections to OHR PDHR Raffi Gregorian and declared that Vukovic was "very close to US intelligence circles and other American structures in BiH."

15. (SBU) This was picked up by Dnevni Avaz, the leading pro-Bosniak daily which carried an article on January 19 alleging that Vukovic, along with two others police officials, were actually criminals themselves. The newspaper stressed that these three reached very high places in the police forces after the war and falsely sold themselves as "big fighters" against Islamic terrorism to international intelligence agencies. Vukovic's arrest, the Avaz story implied, revealed that they themselves were criminals. The next day an op ed in Dnevni Avaz asserted that the arrest of Vukovic raises doubt about everything Vukovic was doing, especially his involvement in the CRC.

Serbs use the Arrest to attack the State

16. (SBU) The Serb Democratic Party (SDS) called on leaders of ruling parties to replace the BiH Council of Ministers and asserted that Vukovic's arrest was one more sign that BiH has become a state whose institutions were deeply enmeshed in criminality. The Alliance of Independent Social Democrat's (SNSD) Rajko Vasic said that the arrest would harm BiH. The problem was the CoM was an "artificial institution, which lacked concrete criteria for employment, allowing, Vasic implied, it to regularly employ "criminals," such as Vukovic. RS Interior Minister Stanislav Cadjio announced that Vukovic's arrest demonstrated the sorry state of affairs at the Ministry of Security. Other Serb officials intimated that Vukovic's arrest demonstrated the failure of OHR to properly vet candidates for high office. OHR quickly retorted that that responsibility was transferred in 2006 to BiH state structures.

Croats urge Patience; Terrorism Threat is Real

17. (SBU) Croat politicians, such as HDZ-BiH official Ivo Miro

Jovic, stressed that the public should not jump to conclusions about Vukovic's guilt until the investigation was complete. Deputy Security Minister Mijo Kresic (HDZ-BiH) echoed this sentiment and also disputed allegations that Vukovic's arrest automatically discredited reports of "Islamic terrorist" activity in BiH. Kresic stressed that that assessments of possible terrorist threats in BiH came not from Vukovic alone but from a number of officials and agencies. He stressed that such issues fell under the competency of police agencies and the Bosnian intelligence agency (OSA) and were not the sole responsibility of Assistant Minister Vukovic.

Comment

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18. (C) The arrest of Vjekoslav Vukovic is disturbing for several reasons. First, if Vukovic is found guilty, it is obviously extremely troubling that a senior BiH official overseeing the fight against organized crime could be complicit in weapons trafficking and attempted murder. Second, even if Vukovic is cleared of all allegations, the stigma of the arrest has likely permanently damaged his career and the reputation of an important state-level institution responsible for security issues, thus providing ammunition for detractors of state-level institutions especially in the Republika Srpska. A third and particularly worrying fallout from the arrest is its use by Sadovic and other conservative Bosniak forces to discredit the work of the CRC and to downplay the real dangers to Bosnia from Islamic hardliners who seek to exploit Bosnia's relatively permissive environment, as a potential base for terrorism. Sadovic's comments are part of a series of unhelpful stances he has taken in order to downplay security risks from foreign fighters in BiH.

ENGLISH